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REVIEW OF PROGRESS ON WATER-RELATED ISSUES: REVIEW OF PROGRESS, CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER-RELATED ISSUES (INCLUDING INPUTS FROM SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND REGIONAL COMMISSIONS); CONSIDERATION OF NEW INSTRUMENTS FOR GLOBAL ACTION

LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Draft decision submitted by the Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Mr. D. A. Davis (Canada), on the basis of informal consultations

Follow-up to chapter 18 of Agenda 21

1. The Committee notes with concern the slow pace of progress with regard to the implementation of the recommendations of the Mar del Plata Action Plan 1/ and of Agenda 21. 2/ In spite of the progress achieved during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, it is estimated that, as of 1990, 31 per cent of the world's population did not have access to safe water, and 44 per cent lacked adequate sanitation. 3/

1/ Report of the United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata, 14-25 March 1977 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.II.A.12), chap. I.

2/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992 (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (vol. I and vol. I/Corr.1, vol. II, vol. III and vol. III/Corr.1)) (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: Resolutions adopted by the Conference, resolution 1, annex II.

3/ See report of the Secretary-General on achievements of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade 1981-1990 (A/45/327).

2. Furthermore, the Committee notes with alarm that some 80 countries, comprising 40 per cent of the world's population, are already suffering from serious water shortages and that, in many cases, the scarcity of water resources has become the limiting factor to economic and social development. Ever-increasing water pollution has become a major problem throughout the world, including in coastal zones.

3. The Committee stresses the importance of articulating the rights of humanity and duties of Governments in relation to the water cycle and the need for accelerated action in the field of water as an integral component of global efforts to achieve sustainable development. It reaffirms the right of all human beings to have access to water of suitable quality, as well as the need to prevent irreversible damage to the environment.

4. The Committee affirms that the biosphere is critically dependent on the water cycle, which is being seriously affected by human activities, and each phase of the cycle has a decisive effect on the sustainability of life in all its forms.

5. In view of these considerations, the Committee on Natural Resources decides to transmit to the Commission on Sustainable Development the following recommendations, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1993/302 of 29 July 1993, for use in its review of freshwater at its second session in 1994:

(a) That the Commission on Sustainable Development recommend to Governments the carrying out of diagnostic assessments of their national water problems and issues, including, as appropriate, all the various uses of water; current institutional arrangements and human resources capacities; and harmful effects of water-related disasters. These assessments should be used in formulating a strategy and action plan for the integrated management of land and water resources, taking into account the close interrelationships among water resources, and taking into account the two-way interaction between land use and water resources, encompassing both dependency and generation of impacts. These action plans should take into account the close interrelationship among water resources development, population growth, food production, health and other socio-economic considerations;

(b) That the Commission on Sustainable Development affirm the vital importance of establishing an implementation plan to avert the pending water crisis, incorporating principles for the effective management of land and water resources, guidelines and schedules based on Agenda 21;

(c) That the Commission on Sustainable Development give priority to the preparation of such an implementation plan by 1996, bearing in mind the following considerations:

(i) The plan should define specific areas of priority, identify approaches, tools and mechanisms that can accelerate action by people and Governments at all levels and by the international community, in order to diminish significantly by the year 2010 the threat to freshwater resources;

(ii) The plan should be action-oriented and should recognize both the potential partnerships among Governments, the user level and the private sector, and the need to involve all sectors of the community;

(iii) The plan should give operational guidelines to integrate land and water resources issues in formulating a systematic approach to water resources management for sustainable development;

(iv) The plan should promote the development of improved administrative approaches for the effective management of land and water resources, and for raising the visibility of global water issues;

(v) The plan should emphasize the need for the sustainable utilization of finite and vulnerable water resources, especially groundwater, and the ways to determine the economic and social value of water, for the allocation of water among competing uses and the use of pricing mechanisms;

(d) That the Commission on Sustainable Development support the formulation of the implementation plan to avert the impending water crisis, and, to this end:

(i) Undertake to consider a draft of this plan at its fourth meeting, in 1997;

(ii) Approve the formulation of the plan by the Working Group on Water of the Committee on Natural Resources jointly with the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Water Resources, drawing upon the results of the regional meetings of the United Nations Environment Programme already scheduled to address the issue and other relevant activities of the organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations;

(iii) Encourage interested Governments and the international community to sponsor events to raise awareness of the impending water crisis, including the full utilization of the opportunity afforded by the World Day for Water;

(e) That the Commission on Sustainable Development, in its review of chapter 10 of Agenda 21, on an integrated approach to the planning and management of land resources, pay attention to chapter 18 and, in particular, programme area A, on integrated water resources development and management.